

FEMALE TEACHERS IN OECD COUNTRIES

A report on gender segregation by the European Institute for Gender Equality shows that in all EU countries men dominate certain professional fields, such as engineering and technology. By contrast, a number of jobs are still commonly considered to be for 'women only'. These include pre-school education, nursing, midwifery, secretarial work, and domestic and personal care related services.

The teaching profession is marked by a particularly sharp and growing gender gap. Indeed, data from the

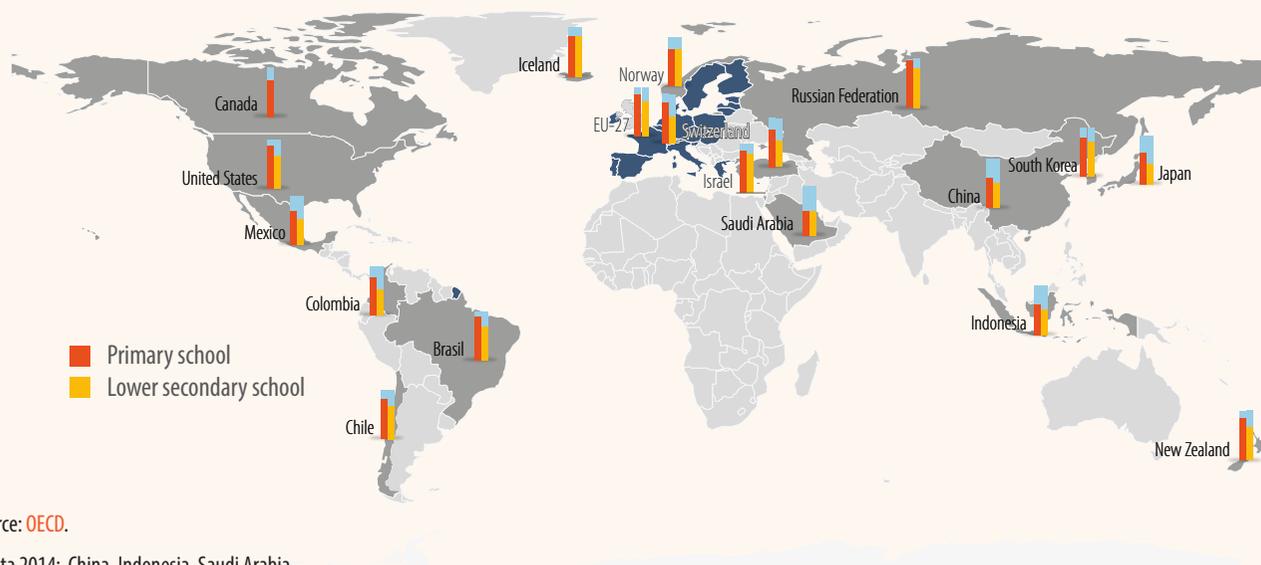
countries belonging to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that, on average, women make up over two-thirds of teachers from pre-primary to tertiary education. The disparity is particularly strong in the Russian Federation, where four out of five teachers are women. The only exception is Japan – with fewer female (48 %) than male teachers across all education levels – a fact that can be partly attributed to the lower participation of Japanese women in the labour market.

More worryingly, the data show a slow but steady

'feminisation' trend in the teaching profession over the last 10 years. Indeed, the average share of female teachers in OECD countries increased from 61 % in 2005 to 65 % in 2010 and 68 % in 2014. While this upward trend is discernible in every country with data available, proportions vary widely between countries – increasing by less than 1 % in the United States, and by more than 15 % in Japan.

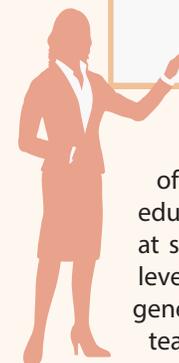
Even more disquieting is the fact that although women make up the majority of the teaching profession, they are relatively under-represented in leadership positions. Thus, in 2016, an average of 68 % of lower secondary teachers were women, but they represented only 45 % of principals, suggesting that female teachers are less likely to be promoted to principal positions than their male counterparts.

Proportion of female teachers in primary and lower secondary education in selected OECD countries, 2017 (2014*)



OECD average

- Pre-primary 97 %
- Primary 92 %
- Secondary 63 %
- Tertiary 43 %



The proportion of female teachers also decreases significantly with the level of education. Women make up as many as 97 % of teachers in pre-primary and 82 % in primary education, whereas the share goes down to 63 % at secondary level and slumps to 43 % at tertiary level. Only the Russian Federation differs from the general pattern and exhibits more female than male teachers in higher education institutions.

Source: OECD.

* Data 2014: China, Indonesia, Saudi Arabia.

FEMALE TEACHERS IN THE EU

The situation is quite similar in the EU where women far outnumber men in the teaching profession. Indeed, in 2017, 72 % of the nearly 6 million people working as school teachers in the EU were women. Quite strikingly, more than eight out of 10 teachers are women in Latvia (87 %), Lithuania (85 %), Bulgaria and Estonia (83 % each).

This gender imbalance is of concern to policy-makers, and the current age distribution of teachers suggests that in the short term the number of men will decrease further. Even in the rare examples of countries where the proportion of men and women teachers is similar, fewer men are now entering the profession than previously.

Some authors argue that **patterns of career choice** are strongly influenced by the social construct of masculinity and femininity, a cumulative historical and social process. The argument has been further developed to show that the existence in western societies of a link between women's domestic roles and their 'natural' disposition towards nurturing has gradually led to the feminisation of teaching.

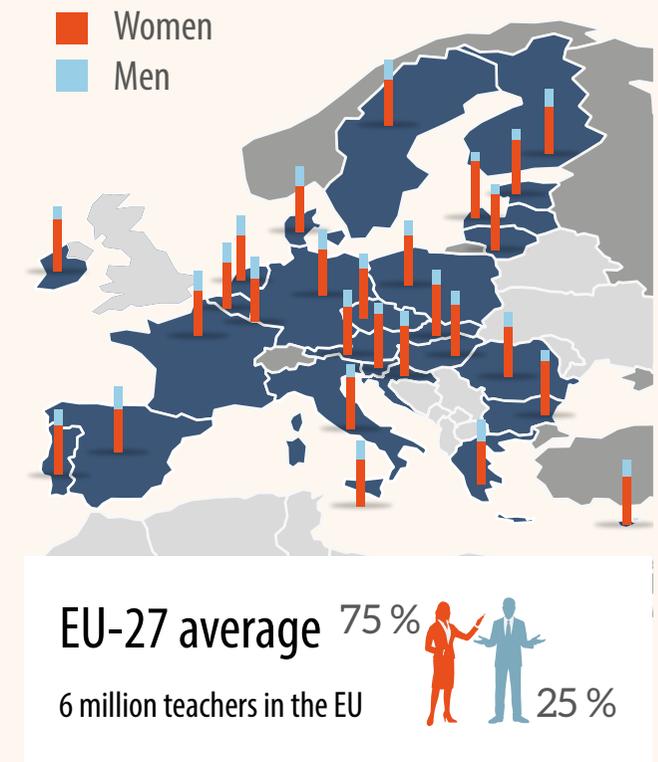
The reasons for the low level of men choosing teaching careers in primary education were explored in an extensive **study** carried out in Ireland. The results suggest that men usually stay away from the profession on the assumption that women have a natural affinity for children and make better primary teachers. The most frequently offered explanation by both students (42 %) and teachers (45 %) for the low proportion of men in primary teaching was linked to the perception that it

is a woman's job or that it relates to the mother's role. Attraction to other careers came second, followed by the perception of primary teaching as unattractive, stressful or requiring too much patience. Low pay, which is often put forward as the prime reason for the low number of men in teaching, came fourth.

Worryingly, research suggests that the more feminised an occupation is, the more likely it is to be badly paid. For example, it has been **suggested** that in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in England and France, the high levels of feminisation of the teaching profession were due to the low value placed on women teachers, which in turn reflected on the profession in general. Scholars **claim** that in the Soviet era, both the prestige and the pay of medical doctors in eastern Europe decreased as the profession became increasingly feminised.

The European Parliament has been consistent in its support for teachers and awareness of the challenges facing them. In 2017, Members **stressed** that teachers play a key role in learners' performance and are a prerequisite for the delivery of the new skills agenda – aiming to make the right training, skills and support available in the EU. Members also insisted that further efforts were needed to attract young people into the education system and to motivate teachers to stay in the profession. This could be achieved among other things by means of better recognition by society of teachers and the provision of attractive pay and working conditions, better access to further training, and also measures to counter violence and harassment against teachers in educational institutions.

Gender distribution of teachers in the EU, primary to upper secondary, 2017



Source: **Teachers in the EU**, Eurostat, 2017.